

NAME: Miyamoto Gunzo DATE OF BIRTH: 1890 PLACE OF BIRTH: Hiroshima  
Age: 85 Sex: M Marital Status: M Education: 8 yrs.

## PRE-WAR:

Date of arrival in U.S.: 1905 Age: 15 M.S. S Port of entry: Hawaii (8mos)  
Occupation/s: 1. Farm laborer 2. Ranch foreman 3. Rancher (owned 80 acres)

Place of residence: 1. Walnut Grove 2. Marysville 3. Fresno

Religious affiliation: Buddhist church

Community organizations/activities: Staff member of Japanese Association  
President of Strawberry Growers' Union

## EVACUATION:

Name of assembly center: Fresno

Name of relocation center: Jerome, Arkansas

Dispensation of property: Leased land Names of bank/s: \_\_\_\_\_

Jobs held in camp: 1. Block manager 2. \_\_\_\_\_

Jobs held outside of camp: Cut down trees for fuel

Left camp to go to: Colorado

## POST-WAR:

Date returned to West Coast: Summer '46

Address/es: 1. Fresno 2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

Religious affiliation: Buddhist church

Activities: 1. 2. 3. \_\_\_\_\_

If deceased, date, place and age at time of death: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of interviewer: Kusunoki Date: 5/7/75 Place: Fresno

Translator: Mabel Hall

Miyamoto, Gunzo  
Fresno, Ca.  
May 7, 1975

Kusunoki: May I ask your name first.  
Miyamoto: My name is Miyamoto Gunzo.  
Q: When were you born?  
A: February 14, 1890.  
Q: Where were you born?  
A: Hiroshima Prefecture.  
Q: Do you remember about your parents?  
A: My mother died when I was 9, and I was brought up by a stepmother.  
That is why I came to America when I was 15 years old.  
Q: How much education did you have in Japan?  
A: I came here right after I graduated from grammar school.  
Q: What kind of a man was your father?  
A: My father did not want me to go to high school, so I decided  
to come to America. I was going to stay in Japan if I failed  
the physical examination but I passed, so I came here.  
Q: Why didn't your father want to go to high school?  
A: As I was the oldest son he was afraid I would not want to succeed  
the family trade if I went to high school.  
Q: Did you have brothers or sisters?  
A: Yes, 2 brothers and 2 sisters.  
Q: What do you remember about your childhood?  
A: In those days the compulsory education was 6 years, so they quit  
school after 6 years, and only a few went to high schools.  
Q: Was your father a farmer?  
A: Yes, he was growing rice and wheat.  
Q: What was the religion of your family?  
A: Buddhism.  
Q: Do you remember any war?  
A: I left Japan in 1905 after the Russo-Japanese War ended. I  
remember seeing Russian prisoners of war when I went to Yokohama.  
Q: What part of 1905 did you leave Japan?  
A: I left Japan in September.  
Q: What kind of people were on board the ship?  
A: There were many Japanese coming to America. The crew were mostly  
Chinese, but the captain was a white man.  
Q: Were there any picture brides on board?  
A: No, there were no picture brides in those days.  
Q: What did you do in Hawaii?  
A: I worked in a sugar plantation for 8 months.  
Q: Were you a contract laborer?  
A: No, I wasn't.  
Q: Did you go to Hawaii alone at the age of 15?  
A: A 16-year-old boy came with me.

Q: Do you remember anything that happened on the ship?

A: I was seasick, so there wasn't anything pleasant to remember.

Q: What did you do when you arrived in Hawaii?

A: I went to a sugar plantation, and worked under a Chinese boss.  
At that time I received only \$18 a month.

Q: About how many people were working in your plantation?

A: About 600 to 700 people.

Q: It was a big camp, wasn't it?

A: No, it was not too big. Some camps had about 2,000 people.

Q: Were the laborers all Japanese?

A: No, there were Chinese and Koreans, also, but the living quarters were separated.

K: Tell me about the life in the camp.

M: There were about 600 people in my camp at that time, and about 10% of them were married. These married people built something like a cafeteria in the center of the camp and cooked meals. I did not eat in the cafeteria because some married couples from Hiroshima cooked for us. I did not know English, so I went to church every evening and learned English from Rev. Rokuro Abe.

Q: Was it a Japanese church?

A: Yes, it was a Japanese church. Rev. Abe came to America later, and I met him here.

Q: Did those 600 people live in the same camp all the time, or did they move around?

A: They stayed there all the time because there was work in the sugar cane field all the year round. Rev. Abe did interpreting and negotiating. I did not attend church on Sundays, but I went to church to learn English.

Q: Was the work in sugar cane field very hard?

A: Yes, it was very hard because I was only 15 then.

Q: How many hours did you work everyday?

A: Ten hours a day.

Q: Did the foreman give you any consideration because you were young?

A: No, but I did a man's job.

Q: Why did you leave Hawaii after 8 months?

A: In those days we had \$50 show money besides the passage. Most people sent it back to Japan after arriving in Hawaii, but I didn't as I wanted to come to America. That is why I had enough money to come to America. I arrived in San Francisco on June 20, 1906 right after the big earthquake, and there were no regular beds in hotels.

Q: Why did you decide to leave Hawaii?

A: Hawaii is very small and noisy with many Japanese, so I didn't want to stay there. Anyway, I wanted to come to America, and Hawaii was a temporary place. I must have been on labor contract because I received a letter from my home telling me that they had to pay some fine for me as I broke the contract.

Q: Did you come to America from Hawaii with your friend?

A: I came here with the same friend I went to Hawaii with.

Q: Where did you stay in San Francisco?

A: At a Japanese hotel.

Q: How long did you stay in San Francisco?

A: A few days, then we went to the country.

Q: Where?

A: At first we went to Walnut Grove as my friend's uncle lived there. There were many Chinese in that area, and gambling houses had good business. We stayed there only one month pulling weeds in the beans. There were ten men in the group so I had to cook once in every ten days.

Q: Was there any special place for Japanese or Chinese to sleep?

A: There was a barn on the ranch, and we put our blankets on the floor of the barn and slept there.

Q: Where did they go gambling?

A: In town.

Q: How was the town where Japanese went to?

A: It was very prosperous not only on Saturdays and Sundays but on weekdays, also. Those who did not have bicycles walked 6 or 7 miles to get there.

Q: Were there any Japanese restaurants?

A: At first there were no restaurants, but there were boarding houses.

Q: Where did you go after that?

A: After a month I went to Lodi, but there was no work there, so I went to Marysville. There I worked on the railroad construction of Utah Construction Company.

Q: How did you find out where to go to get a job?

A: I heard from friends. Once while I was working on the railroad construction we camped near a river. There was a heavy rain and the camp was flooded, so we had to go around many miles to go back to Marysville.

Q: When did you get married?

A: In 1914.

Q: What kind of work did you do until then?

A: I did not know English so I worked as a schoolboy in Sacramento. I also worked as a waiter, dishwasher and a cook.

Q: You were young then so you must have not have much trouble in learning English.

A: No, but the pronunciation was hard. I wished I had learned some more, but it is too late now.

Q: Did you go to school since you came here?

A: No, I didn't. I wish I did.

Q: How did you meet your wife?

A: My parents found her. She was a relative, so I saw her before.

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Q: Then she wasn't a picture bride, wasn't she?  
A: She was called a picture bride, but actually I knew her before.  
Q: Where did you live after you got married?  
A: We lived in Reedley. Before I got married I lived in Clovis for 4 years. I worked for 2 years, then I farmed 60 acres by contract with a partner. After that I worked as a Japanese foreman of a 320-acre ranch for a year.  
Q: How was the life as a foreman?  
A: It was just a job. I was only 22 or 23 years old then, so it was hard to give orders to 25 to 30 year old men. After that I farmed 20 acres on contract. In 1919 I bought 40 acres.  
Q: Was there any trouble in buying the land then?  
A: Of course there was. I could not buy land in my name, so I bought it in a Nisei's name.  
Q: Did the Japanese Association or the Farmers' Association help you?  
A: No. They will help the general public, but not the individuals.  
Q: Did the white people consider you as a rival when you worked as a foreman or bought the land?  
A: I don't think they considered me as a rival.  
Q: How many children do you have?  
A: Four.  
Q: When were they born?  
A: Two were born during the depression. The oldest daughter was born in 1916, then the second daughter was born in 1919. Two boys were born after that.  
Q: How was the life of Japanese in Central California during the depression?  
A: It was very miserable. No matter how hard we worked we did not have enough money to live on, so we had to borrow money from the bank. The bank would not loan us money just for growing grape, so we grew strawberry between grape to borrow money.  
Q: Did you have difficulties in educating your children?  
A: We wanted our children to learn Japanese, so we got together and built schools, hired teachers and sent our children to Japanese language schools. There were about 11 Japanese communities, and each community had a Japanese school.  
Q: How often did these Japanese language school meet a week?  
A: Once a week on Saturdays.  
Q: What kind of subjects did they teach?  
A: I don't know what kind of subjects they taught.  
Q: Did you send your children to Japan?  
A: No, I didn't.  
Q: What do you think about sending the children to Japan?  
A: I might have if I could afford it, but I couldn't. I think it was better I didn't because some children and their parents do not get along well after they were separated for a long time.

Q: How was the housing in those days?

A: People who bought land with good houses were lucky, but most people lived in shabby houses. We could not help it because we could not afford nice houses.

Q: What is your present religion?

A: Buddhism.

Q: Have you been a Buddhist since you were in Japan?

A: Yes.

Q: Is there any difference in Buddhist churches before the war and now?

A: No I don't think so.

Q: How many children did you have at the time of depression?

A: I had four.

Kusunoki: Now, about Pearl Harbor.

Miyamoto: I was associated with the Japanese Association, so I was prepared to be arrested. Fortunately no staff members from this district was arrested. I think it was because Rep. Gerhardt who was a friend of Mr. Setsu Sakamoto who was the director of the Japanese Association wrote a letter to the president saying that the Japanese Association would not oppose America or disturb the peace. I think it worked because while the staff members of the Japanese Association from other districts were all arrested, we were spared. Only the staff members of Judo or Kendo Associations were arrested.

Q: When and where did you hear the news of Pearl Harbor attack for the first time?

A: I don't remember well. I think I was fishing.

Q: How did you get the evacuation notice?

A: We had some time to get ready. At that time I was the president of a strawberry association. There were over 120 growers, so I had to take care of them. Then I sold the rights of the association to the Pacific Fruit Company. In those days we could travel only 5 miles by car, and if we wanted to go over that limit we had to get a permission. I had to go 10 to 15 miles to collect money, and then they would give me checks for deposit only, so I did not cash to give to the growers. I finally entered the assembly center on Fresno Fairground on Apr. 18, 1942.

Q: What did you do with your property and furnitures?

A: I leased the 80-acre land to a white man. I leased the house, and left the furnitures in one room. Many people stored their belongings in government warehouses. We took only things we could carry.

Q: How old were your children?

A: The oldest one was in the service. When the children all grew up and were going to help me, the war broke out. At that time people living on the west side of Highway 99 had to go to the assembly center, but the east side of Hwy. 99 was free zone, so those living there did not have to go. Later they had to go, too.

Q: What do you remember most that happened after the Pearl Harbor and before you entered the assembly center?

A: I worked for the strawberry growers' association everyday, and never stayed home in the daytime. But there was a curfew, so I had to stay home after 6 o'clock. There were all kinds of posters on the poles. People who did not like Japanese must have thought it was a good chance to do that kind of things, but my good friends showed sympathy towards us.

Q: What kind of attitudes did Chinese, Koreans and Filipinos have?

A: I did not have any dealings with them. Only once when I came back here from Denver after the war and stopped at a Chinese restaurant, we were told that we would not be served because we were Japanese.

Q: Which camp did you go to?

A: Jerome, Arkansas.

Q: When?

A: October '42.

Q: Wasn't it a cold place.

A: Yes, it was very cold.

Q: How did you get to Jerome from here?

A: It took 4 days to get to Arkansas by train. Once in a while it stopped and let us exercise, but armed soldiers watched us so that we wouldn't escape. It was an old train, and it took a southern route via Los Angeles.

Q: About how many people went to Jerome from Fresno?

A: Almost all the Japanese from Fresno city went to Jerome. People who lived in the country on the eastside did not have to go at first, so they used to come and visit us in the assembly center. But they came to the camp around September.

Q: Who went to the camp with you?

A: My wife, brother, sister and her daughter. Others were all married or in the service.

Q: Were your children all grown up?

A: Yes, they were all grown up. My younger son also went into service after we went to Denver. We left Jerome after six month because there was too much trouble as a block manager.

Q: Were there "Yes group" and "no group"?

A: Yes, they were divided into those two groups. As I was a block manager I could not be in "No group". Because of it my good friend became my enemy. One of my friends asked me if I was going out of the camp to help American soldiers, so I said may be so, but if I stayed in camp I would not be able to help Japanese soldiers when they come here. My son-in-law was in "No group" so my daughter went back to Japan with her children.

Q: Wasn't he a Nisei?

A: Yes, he was a Nisei. There were many such Niseis. They were mostly ones who went to Japan when they were little.

Q: Do you remember anything special that happened while you were in Jerome for 6 months?

A: In other camps they burned coal, but in our camp there were many trees so we went out in the wood and cut down trees. We piled the logs on wagons pulled by mule. It was hard to hitch the wagon on the mule without a harness. Luckily there were no wild mule. It rained all the time, and the water did not drain, so we had to go in the mud to catch the mule.

Q: Did you get paid for cutting down trees?

A: Yes, we did. The top pay was \$19 a month, regular pay was \$17, and women's pay was \$13. Block managers like myself and chief cooks received \$19.

Q: Was there any other allowance?

A: We received \$4 a month as clothing allowance.

Q: Was it given to everybody regardless of age?

A: Yes, adults or children all received \$4 a month.

Q: Were there any other work?

A: Yes, growing vegetables etc.

Q: Was it in the camp?

A: Yes, it was in the camp. There were farmers, firemen, policemen according to their profession. There were meetings of block managers once in a while. When people are inside the fence, their feelings are exposed, good or bad.

Q: What was your reason for leaving Jerome in six months?

A: My friends looked at me as if I was pro-American and no good for Japan, so it was not pleasant.

Q: Did many people stay in Jerome 2 or 3 years?

A: Yes, but Jerome was the first camp to be closed as it was close to the East. Many people went to Chicago, New York and New Jersey from there.

Q: Where in Colorado did you go to?

A: I lived in Kingsburg for a year. Then I farmed in Brighton with a relative as a partner for a year. After that I quit farming and went to Denver and bought a house. I came back here a year after the war was over.

Q: Were there many Japanese in Kingsburg?

A: Many Japanese worked under one big landlord there.

Q: How about Brighton? Isn't there a large Buddhist church there?

A: It is quite large, and there were many Japanese there.

Q: Did these Japanese come from the camps or were they living there before?

A: In those days 75% of Japanese in Kingsburg came from camps.

Q: What was the biggest joy in those days after leaving the camp and starting a new life.

A: There wasn't anything happy. It used to hail a lot in Colorado before the harvest time, and damaged the crops.

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Q: Where did your second son join the service from?

A: From Colorado right before the war was over. My oldest son was on his way to Korea when the war was over. He was a lieutenant.

Q: How did you feel about you going to camp when your son was in the service?

A: During the war my grandson died in Tule Lake ran over by a coal truck. I was in Colorado at that time, so I went to Denver and got a permission to go to the funeral. I went to Reno by train, and then I took a bus to Tule Lake. I was supposed to have reported to the Army and escorted to the camp, but I did not want to hold up the funeral for a week, so I took a bus. There was no trouble in Nevada, but when the bus entered California, the people who got on the bus gawked at me. When I arrived at Tule Lake I was court martialed for going there without an escort. At that time I thought if they give me a hard time I would ask the Army to return my son, but I only had to stay in jail for a night. On the way back I had an escort until I left California.

Q: When did you come here from Colorado?

A: In January '46. I came back to Fresno to see if I should farm that year or not. That is the time a Chinese restaurant in Utah refused to serve us.

Q: Did anything else happen when you came back?

A: I went to the bank first and asked the manager if I should come back or not. The manager said that he would not guarantee if it was safe for him to come back or not. He said someone might pour coal over your raisin. Then I went to see the agricultural commissioner of the Agricultural Department. He was friendly with me before the war but he didn't seem to welcome me, so I went back to Colorado and stayed there for another year.

Q: When did Japanese start coming back to Fresno area?

A: Around February or March of '46 the Buddhist church opened a hostel, and people stayed there until their houses became vacant.

Q: Did you return to your house?

A: People were still living in my house, so I stayed at my friend's house for a week.

Q: Did many Japanese come back here in Spring and summer of '46?

A: Yes. Around that time they didn't sell things to Japanese at stores. There were many Okies who didn't want Japanese to come back. Someone shot at Mr. Sakamoto's house a few doors from here. Also, in Clovis Mr. Watanabe's house was shot at.

Q: Didn't the police control such cases?

A: They couldn't because these things happen at night, so they only made reports.

Q: Didn't any Japanese protest?

A: No, Japanese did not have the guts to protest.

Q: What was the hardest thing you can remember after you came back from Denver?

A: There wasn't anything hard I can remember.

Q: Then what is your happy memory?

A: I think that would be the time when my business went smoothly and I built a house in the country.

Q: As we approach the end of this interview, as an Issei do you have any advice to young Sanseis and Yonseis?

A: I may be prejudices, but I think there are very little successors of farmers. Young people seem to like going into easy-going white-collar jobs. Some white-collar people may make much money, but I think farming is not bad. It is not good all the time, but when it is good we have much more income than the white-collar people. I regret that they do not like farming. I think the farmers lead carefree lives without being bound by time. For example, in most places in America funerals are held at night. Only in Fresno 80% of funerals are held around 2 o'clock in the afternoon. This is because farmers have free time. No matter how rich you are, if you are bound by time and have no freedom it is no good. I think we should think about this. In 5 or 10 years when all the Isseis are gone, Sanseis and Yonseis would not be able to have funerals in the afternoon. I don't want them to become farmers just because of funerals. I think if we have time we can contribute to the society. From that reason I encourage people to become farmers.

Q: Do you have any instruction to young people.

A: Niseis are our children, but when it comes to Sanseis and Yonseis we cannot communicate with them. They do not understand Japanese, and we cannot explain in detail in English.

Q: What do you think about the lifestyle of Sanseis?

A: I do not know how they will be. For instance when a Buddhist marry a Christian, they will become Christians if the Christian faith is stronger, and Buddhists if the Buddhist faith is stronger. We cannot do anything about it because there is freedom of worship.

Q: Do you think the Sanseis are associating with the whites, the blacks and other race on equal footing?

A: I think they are. I don't think the Sanseis have pride as Japanese. I think 90% of Isseis do not care what kind of race the children marry except the blacks. There are a few Sanseis who married the blacks.

Q: Niseis didn't marry the blacks, didn't they?

A: There were a few. Some Niseis did not bring up their children right. They were needy, so they are always possed with the idea that they want their children to have everything. That is how they spoilt their children. For instance, when we were bringing up children we could not afford to buy cars for our children, but now almost all the children in the country have cars when they graduate from highschools.

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When they go to colleges they live in apartments instead of dormitories. There will be much expense, but the parents send money without complaint. It may be an old man's worry, but I wonder what will happen if things go bad with the parents. It is too bad we cannot communicate with the Sanseis and Yonseis because we do not understand each other. They call me grandpa, but they do not come near me.

Q: In San Francisco some Sanseis started movements to take care of Isseis. For instance, have you heard of Kimochi-Kai in San Francisco?

A: Yes, I read about it in the paper.

K: They have a little room in Japan Trade Center where old men come to play Shogi, and old ladies knit or sew. The Konko Church serves them lunch prepared by Japanese restaurants. There are similar groups here and there, but I think Kimochi-Kai is the largest in this district. There may be other ones in Los Angeles.

M: I heard that Mr. Wada is going to start a senior citizen's home in Los Angeles. In Central California, also, there was a plan to build an apartment for Isseis. Those who live in apartments should be able to cook and take care of themselves, but there are hardly any such Isseis left in Central California. If they build such large apartment and only a few Japanese live there and the rest is occupied by the blacks it will not be safe, so they gave up the idea. I am about the youngest Issei, and I am 85 years old. The average age of Isseis may be 90.

K: If we had started this project 10 or 15 years ago we would have been able to hear the stories of pioneer Isseis.

M: Mr. Okuda is 97 years old. He has a clear head, but he is hard of hearing. There is a 101-year old man, but he cannot hear at all.

Q: Do some Isseis around here meet and have dinner or listen to music?

A: No, we cannot drive ourselves, and we do not want to ask our children to take us places. In Fresno Mr. Takemoto is 86, Mr. Sumoto is 90. Mr. Tsugano is about 85, and Mr. Orie is around 85. That is about all, and none of us drive, so we cannot get together and have a good time even if we wanted to. About ten years ago those who received medals from Dai-Nihon No-Kai (Great Japan Agricultural Society), but we have not had a chance to meet since then.

K: Please tell me about this medal.

M: It is the Fifth Order of Merit and the Order of the Sacred Treasure I received from the Emperor on June 14, 1968.

Q: For what merit were you awarded this medal?

A: I think for my work before and after the war. Before the war I served as a director of the Japanese Association, worked as the president of the Strawberry Growers' Association for 50 years, and managed a Japanese language school for 2 years. After the war I participated in the movement to attain American naturalization privileges.

Q: What is this one?

A: It is a commendation from the Japan Agricultural Association which I received in 1960. It reads, "I award this medal to Gunzo Miyamoto for his contribution to the promotion of industry, increase of public welfare, protection of civil rights and friendship between Japan and America." signed Prince Takamatsu, president of the Japan Agricultural Ass'n.

Q: Did this come from Japan, also?

A: Yes. This is a green and white medal. That one is red and white medal which is higher. I received it in 1966.

Q: What is this one? from the Foreign Minister

A: Many people received this commendation in 1960 on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the opening of trade between Japan and America.

Q: Are there any more awards?

A: I received this certificate with a gold watch from the Kikaken Kisei Domei in December 1953. I was glad I received a nice Christmas present.

K: Please read it, and I will tape it.

M: I cannot read it.

K: "This is a certificate from the Northern California Kikaken Kisei Domei presented to Mr. Gunzo Miyamoto in recognition of untiring efforts and leadership during the past seven years which culminated in the nullification of the Alien Land Law and the attainment of American naturalization privileges for people of Japanese ancestry." Dec. 12, 1953 President Koda.

M: This one is from the Buddhist church when the annex was built.

K: You sure have all kinds of awards.

Q: Did you receive the Fifth Order of Merit on the Cultural Day?

A: I think so.

## 帰化权 請求 司賀

K: Will you tell me about the Kikaken Kisei Domei?

M: When we came back from the camps, the Land Law was very strict. Some interested person met in Stockton and decided to do something about the Land Law. It was written in the Land Law that aliens who could not be naturalized could not own land. So we had to attain naturalization privilege, and at the same oppose the Land Law. Therefore we decided to send Mike Masacka of JACL to Washington, and on the other hand we would raise \$250,000 as the campaign fund. That is how the Kikaken Kisei Domei was organized in February 1946.

Q: Then it was right after you came back from the camp, wasn't it?

A: Yes, because people were arrested here and there. At that time the government proposed a compromising plan that if we paid half of the value of the land, they will recognize the ownership of the land. There were more than ten people at that time who paid half the price of the land and had the ownership of their land recognized. We did not know how it would be in the future. There were more landowners in Fresno area in Central California than any other place, so they raise \$250,000 by collecting \$2 an acre from landowners and \$1 an acre from those who farmed by contract. Then we set up a headquarter in San Francisco with Mr. Sugiyama as the secretary, and sent Mike Masacka to Washington. Since our campaign started I went to San Francisco twice or three times a year for conference. It was very hard to pass the Senate. Finally in the 7th year we asked Senator Walter of Minnesota to present our proposal on the naturalization, and asked the Secretary of State Dean Achson to act as our attorney. When Mr. Achson testified that anybody who was born in this country has the citizenship, the Land Act was nullified.

Q: Do many people know about the Kikaken Kisei Domei?

A: Only ones who worked for it were Mr. Kanagawa, Mr. Sakamoto and myself.

Q: About how many people benefited by Kikaken Kisei Domei?

A: All the Isseis did. But people in Southern California did not contribute any because most landowners were in Central California.

K: I heard that some Japanese farmers around Fresno organized a farmers' union and fought against the depression.

M: It must be the Sun Maid Raisin Association. It was organized around 1907. They must have joined it.

Q: Were the members of this union all Japanese?

A: No, they were mostly white people. Japanese were not powerful to organize a union then.

K: I want to close this interview now. Do you have any other interesting stories?

M: No, I don't.